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# AN ORATION

ON THE DEATH OF

# ABRAHAM LINCOLN

LATE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

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BY ROLFE S. SAUNDERS.

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DELIVERED ON ISLAND 40, APRIL 25, 1865.

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MEMPHIS:

W. A. WHITMORE, STEAM BOOK AND JOB PRINTER, NO. 13 MADISON STREET.

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# ORATION.

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FELLOW-CITIZENS:

We live in one of the most eventful periods of the world's history since the dawn of civilization upon earth. Not a day passes but some thrilling incident occurs—some deed, dark and bloody, is committed—some startling event transpires—some brilliant achievement witnessed,—which will furnish material that will live in history or in song. The annals of the world afford few parallels to what the American people have witnessed—the scenes and hardships they have passed through—the part in the great drama they have acted, in the past four years of bloody war. The “dark ages”—the horrors of the French Revolution—the iniquities of the Spanish Inquisition—the treachery, perfidy and barbarity of Italian scenes—and the ferocity of savage warfare,—present not a page so dark and damning, mournful and heart-rending—so diabolical and wicked, and so cruelly inexcusable, as has blighted and blasted the fair name of our Country in that short space of time. All Christendom stands aghast at the horrid picture, and Humanity weeps tears of blood over the sad reality it presents. It is left for the middle of the nineteenth Century, with the lights of Christianity and Civilization before them, for the

American people to shock the world, and put in awe, all mankind, at the hideous deeds of blood perpetrated "in the name of liberty," by a race of people claiming the first rank among the nations of the earth! That a people so enlightened—a people professing love for God and a belief in the Christian Religion—a people blessed above and beyond any other on earth—a people, happy, prosperous, free and untrammelled—living in a land of liberty—better educated, as a whole, than any other nation of Ancient or Modern times—surrounded by every blessing they could ask, and the protection of the best government which God ever bestowed upon man, since the fall of Adam;—that such a favored people, should, in an evil hour, bring upon themselves and their posterity such untold evils as we have been cursed with, is indeed, a most strange and unaccountable anamoly.

We have assembled together to-day on a most solemn and momentous occasion, to express, if possible, our deep sense of the bereavement the country has sustained in the sad and tragic death of the illustrious and honored Chief Magistrate of this great Nation. For the first time in the history of our government are we called upon to mourn the death of our President by the bloody hand of assassination. The whole land is filled with mourning. The lamentations of sorrow flow from every heart. Men weep, who but a day before had no tears to shed for any human being on earth. The language of sorrow and distress gush forth spontaneously from every bosom. ABRAHAM LINCOLN, the President of the United States, has fallen by the bloody hand of a fiendish assassin. It was a most terrible blow to our distracted country, particularly at this most critical juncture in our affairs. It is the saddest blow ever aimed at the peace and happiness of a great nation. BENEDICT ARNOLD betrayed the cause of his country; AARON BURNETT plotted treason against her Constitution and Laws; JEFF. DAVIS lifted his

impious hand to strike down her liberties and destroy the great work of our Fathers ; but the severest and most fearful blow ever aimed at the vitals of our country, by any man, was inflicted by J. WILKES BOOTH when he struck down ABRAHAM LINCOLN !

We were just emerging from a long and bloody night of four years' war—such a war as had never before blackened the annals of time. For the first time since the commencement, was a gleam of the joyous light of PEACE seen to dawn upon the impenetrable gloom that hung as a pall of death over our country and destruction to our people. Patriotic exultation ran high in every honest heart at the glorious—the heavenly prospect of PEACE, and the return of law and order. The giant contest between the master military chieftains of the age, one for the vindication and maintenance of his government, and the other battling for the establishment of his—a contest in which the fate of the great struggle seemed to be staked, turned the scales. The victor, greater than Alexander, Cæsar or Napoleon, with the God-like impulses of WASHINGTON, tendered the welcome olive branch to his “erring brethren ;” and the great leader—the humane, unselfish and patriotic chief, accepted the magnanimous terms, and surrendered to the flag of his Country ! It was the sublimest spectacle ever witnessed in the military history of the world. The terms offered and accepted were such as had never before been granted by an army flushed with victory ;—such terms as only an American and a patriot, who loved his Country and her welfare above every other consideration, could offer ; and every honest heart in the nation felt that at last, after a long and bloody struggle, peace was to be restored, and our people, laying aside the bloody implements of war, were again to become “one and inseparable,” free, prosperous and happy.

Such were the auspicious omens of peace to our distracted



land, when one of the most wicked and diabolical deeds known in the book of crime, was perpetrated; and our whole country filled with a gloom and sadness which had never before pervaded it, even when the sainted spirit of the immortal Father of his Country was called from earth to the blessed abode of the Just made Perfect.

It is not uncommon, now-a-days, to hear zealous partizan friends of favorite leaders attribute to them a comparison to WASHINGTON. Respect to the memory of the illustrious Father of his Country, as well as to all men who may live after him, forbid the use of all such comparisons. No man has lived, or is likely ever to live, who is entitled to that distinction. WASHINGTON possessed a rare combination of virtues and excellencies, which all may strive to emulate, but none claim to equal. Parallels have been instituted between great minds that have been the terror or the glory of their age: comparisons are urged concerning the precepts of philosophers, the codes of reformers and the achievements of conquerors; but in them is no mention of GEORGE WASHINGTON. He stands alone, a character without a prototype and without a successor. The Revolutionist who led mankind to Liberty: the Statesman who constructed the edifice of Freedom: the Conqueror who laid down his sword in the hour of triumph: the Ruler who abdicated power in the zenith of his popularity: the Man who could look down from the loftiest pinnacle of human greatness without dizziness, and look up from the humble sphere of the citizen without envy!

"No thing can cover his high fame but heaven,  
No pyramids set-off his memories  
But the eternal substance of his greatness:  
To which I leave him,"

Bolivar was a gallant soldier, a wise statesman and an incorruptible patriot; but when flushed with success, in the



hour of triumph, proclaimed himself "the WASHINGTON of the South." All mankind smiled with contempt at his presumptuous arrogance.

Select your favorite of all the great men who have "ruled, reigned or fell" in Ancient or Modern times,—laud them to the full measure of their deserts,—heap upon them the language of panegyric—exhaust the powers of eulogy; but compare them not to WASHINGTON.

Mr. LINCOLN came into power at the most fearful and critical period of our Government, assuming responsibilities even weightier than those resting upon the illustrious Father of his Country, in first entering upon the duties of that office. The responsibilities he had to meet were such as to put to the utmost of their powers, the incomparable wisdom and patriotism of WASHINGTON; the skill, statesmanship and ability of HAMILTON, CLAY and WEBSTER; and the valor and heroism of JACKSON, TAYLOR and SCOTT. Never before was mortal man called upon to meet such exigencies. The Country was at a most fearful crisis. Upon his action depended the "lives and fortunes"—the peace and happiness, of thirty millions of freemen. The integrity of the Government, which had chosen him as its Executive Head, was to be maintained. The Union was threatened with dismemberment, and presented a scene never before witnessed, of six of the States comprising it, claiming to have thrown off their allegiance and formed a separate and independent government of their own! A faction, hatched in the hell-born hotbeds of Treason,—smothered for a time by the undaunted patriotism of ANDREW JACKSON, and crushed, at a later day, by the serene and Washington-like statesmanship of MILLARD FILLMORE,—had revived in a more formidable shape than on any former occasion their efforts to destroy the Government, and had actually put into operation their government purporting to embrace six of the sovereign States of THE

GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA! Their government was organized. A president, vice-president, cabinet and congress were formed and had set up for themselves. Commissioners were dispatched to Washington City to treat with the United States Government for terms of *separation* and their acknowledgment as an *independent* nation! It was indeed a most critical period. All felt it. Every patriot in the land trembled with forebodings for the result. There may have been insane and infamous factions of very bad men, both in the North and in the South, who witnessed these scenes with fiendish joy; but subsequent events have proven, when the hour of trial came, that that class, at both sections, proved false to their professed principles, and true only to the instincts of the hyena, were found feasting over their country's misfortunes!

The public acts of all men are the legitimate theme of criticism; and in discharging the duties of this occasion, it may be necessary for me to give expression to views and opinions from which some may differ with me. The truth of history requires it at my hands, and I shall do so with all respect to the illustrious and lamented dead, not desiring or wishing to detract from a laurel of his well-earned fame.

MR. LINCOLN took into his hands the reins of government with six sovereign States unrepresented in our national councils—with their delegations withdrawn from our national congress. What was he to do? A *majority* of the people in every State in the Union, with perhaps the solitary exception of South Carolina, *undoubtedly* desired his course should be such as to crush treason, avert civil war, and save the country. Many speculations arose as to the policy he would adopt. We all remember the painful anxiety the whole country experienced on that occasion. MR. LINCOLN left many people in doubt as to what policy he would pursue in administering the government. His Inaugural Address,

and the speeches made by him *en route* from Springfield to the National Capitol, were interpreted to mean different things in different latitudes. The country did not know for a long time whether it was his intention to "hold, possess and provision" Fort Sumter, or abandon it to the rebels. The Commissioners sent by the rebels were kept in Washington for a long period of time, when General JACKSON or Mr. FILLMORE would never have received them at all, or if they had, would have dismissed them before breakfast.

Time passed on. The first gun was fired at Sumter upon the flag that had waved in triumph and victory in every conflict. It was the first time it had ever been lowered to an enemy. The effect was electrical. The whole North was aroused with patriotic indignation, and a determination to vindicate the Flag of the Nation and retrieve—wipe out the insult. The South, with an unanimity almost as great, rallied as a man, after the first blow had been struck, to fight it out to *independence* as the only alternative. The flush and passion of the moment was aroused and acted upon without calculating the cost or the consequences. Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina and Arkansas, which had steadfastly refused to join their fortunes to that of the seceded States, now faltered, and were "precipitated" into this mighty whirlpool of civil strife. The wildest commotion ruled. Chaos and confusion prevailed throughout the whole vast country.

Mr. LINCOLN occupied a very peculiar relation to the American people. He was the first President ever elected by a sectional vote; and in the election, fell short about one million votes of the popular vote, of receiving a majority. It was a most unfortunate occurrence for the American people, that by divisions, bickerings and strife, any candidate of a sectional party should have succeeded in that, or any

other national contest. Equally is it to be regretted that Mr. LINCOLN should have ever been the representative of a sectional party.

A greater mistake was never made by the Southern leaders than when they used the *pretext* of his election—which was in strict conformity to the Constitution,—as a justification for secession. But at such a crisis as this, the country needed for her Chief Magistrate, not a new man, as Mr. LINCOLN was, nor the representative of a sectional party,—but a national man in all his feelings and in all his *surroundings*; a man of long experience in public affairs, and possessing the confidence of the whole American people in his ability, statesmanship and patriotism;—a man of the ANDREW JACKSON-HENRY CLAY-DANIEL WEBSTER stamp, in whose presence treason would not dare show its foul head. The election of such a man would have united the Union element of the South with the mighty Conservative feeling of the North, and made rebellion but a halter to those who dared try the experiment! But had a man of that character been in the Presidential chair in the place of the perfidious, corrupt and infamous BUCHANAN, and had arrested the leading conspirators at the beginning of their work, and brought them to that summary punishment with which Gen. JACKSON threatened the original CATALINE of the tribe, in the dark days of South Carolina nullification,—there would have been a short road, and sure end, to all our national troubles, then and for all time to come.

Elected by a sectional party, flushed with victory, and after a most heated and exciting contest, Mr. LINCOLN too often yielded to the unwise and unreasonable behests of that party, when the very men who were bringing “pressure” to bear upon him, were *politicians* who were looking to such a policy as would advance their *party* and selfish schemes; leaving the country to take care of itself! In such

an hour of trial and peril to our glorious institutions, he should have spurned them with patriotic indignation, and *never deviated* from the remembrance that he had a Country to *save* and not a Party to *serve*. It was no time for party. WASHINGTON had no party when he subdued and put down the whiskey insurrection. General JACKSON, though strictly a party man, lost all sight of party and partyism when South Carolina nullified our laws, and leaned upon the strong right-arm of WEBSTER and CLAY as his main defence in hewing down and crushing out the hydra-headed monster of Nullification and Treason. The wise, good and great FILLMORE, elected on a party ticket, at a time when disunion ran high and civil war threatened us, in the hour of trial called around him CLAY and WEBSTER, CASS and DOUGLAS, CLEMENS and FOOTE, and glorious old SAM HOUSTON, and by their united efforts, averted the horrors of civil war, saved the country, and won the plaudits of all good men of all parties, for all time to come. Had Mr. LINCOLN followed their wise example in this particular, there is not a doubt that he would have long since brought us out of our present great troubles; and as the difficulties he encountered were much greater and more complex than those presented to any of his predecessors, he would have, in like proportion, added to his renown in the magnitude and extent and unparalleled greatness of the achievement, and his hold upon the gratitude and affections of the American people.

But this is not the occasion to indulge in criticism. Mr. LINCOLN made mistakes—committed blunders; and who of all our great and wise rulers have not? But his blunders were not wilful nor his mistakes criminal—they *were honest*—errors of *judgment*—which it is “divine” in all who may differ—“to forgive.” He was an *honest man*,

“The noblest work of God;”

of warm and generous impulses, and a kind and noble heart.

“All the ends he aimed at,  
Were his Country’s, his God’s, and Truth’s.”

“With *malice* towards none, with *charity* for all, *firm* in the *right* as God gives us to see the *right*, let us *bind* up the *wounds* of our country.” Noble sentiments, sublimely and most fitly spoken! This lofty and patriotic expression is a key to the whole life and character of ABRAHAM LINCOLN.



It will ever stand a proud monument to his name.

The reward so beautifully expressed by Gray, will be most tenderly ascribed to him by millions of grateful hearts, to

"Read his history in a nation's eyes."

The present generation may not do him justice—may condemn some of his public acts; the American people may regret his policy on important subjects; yet impartial history will draw over his life the mantle to cover all his shortcomings, and rising above sectional feeling and party rancor, do justice to his fame and honor to his memory.

———"To live with fame  
The gods allow to many; but to die,  
With equal lustre, is a blessing Heaven  
Selects from all her choicest boons of Fate,  
And with a sparing hand, on few bestows."

Whatever difference may have existed as to the policy by which he was governed, it should now be enough for any honest man and patriot to know that he was actuated by good motives, high resolves and an honest heart. "The restoration of the Union in the shortest way," as he wrote one of his friends, was no doubt the ruling wish and desire of his life. The latter portion of his days were especially devoted to the accomplishment of that great end—the crowning glory of his fame, and what would have resulted in the speedy peace of the nation, and the eternal and everlasting good and happiness of our whole people. He showed in that great instance that he could

———"Look on rebellion  
In the calm light of mild philosophy,"

and in a spirit only of love and patriotism, grant such terms of pacification and reconciliation as would bind up the wounds of a bleeding country, make our people united and happy, and place our glorious Union upon a firm basis from which it could never be again shaken by all the storms of party faction that may hereafter howl and rage around it.

Had Mr. LINCOLN's life been prolonged thirty days, it is believed there would not have been found a rebel in arms against the Government. It is understood his plans for peace were entirely acceptable to General LEE, the greatest, wisest and best of the Southern leaders. The Southern people have long looked to *him* to lead them out of their great difficulties; and reposing confidence more fully in him than any one else, there is every reason to believe that they

would have embraced the opportunity of following his example of laying down their arms and returning to the fold of their fathers, with rapturous joy and delight. Then who can estimate the magnitude and extent of the nation's loss, at such an hour? Who can fathom the depths of the misery, ruin and desolation that may flow from that awful calamity to the American people, and especially to the people of the South? If there be an human being in this broad land, who does not feel *his* loss—the loss of the nation—of the cause of free government,—in the untimely death of ABRAHAM LINCOLN, that being is to be pitied, and is unworthy to live in a land of liberty.

MR. LINCOLN was a Representative-Man of the great North-West; and his elevation to the Presidency was a most remarkable illustration of the genius and workings of our institutions—showing how the humblest, by dint of energy and perseverance, may reach the highest positions of honor and trust within the gift of the people. I stand to-day upon the banks of the mighty Mississippi, almost immediately opposite, and in sight of the house where, thirty-four years ago, he was employed by a venerable and respected citizen now living in Memphis, in chopping cord wood *at seventy-five cents per cord!* In less than thirty years from that date, ABRAHAM LINCOLN was President of the United States of America!

The instance of his successor, ANDREW JOHNSON, is no less striking an illustration. His history we all know; the difficulties he encountered and triumphed over, we are all familiar with. With an education derived entirely without the aid of schools, he commenced life, poor and penniless—an apprentice boy, without friends, and in less than a quarter of a century from the time he is first honored by the people with an election, we find him Ruler of the first nation of the earth! It is now to be hoped, that as he has ever yet shown himself equal to the occasion, in this great trial of the Nation's salvation and PEACE—the People's welfare and Posterity's happiness, he will prove himself worthy the successor of WASHINGTON, and go down to all coming time, as the Great Instrument in the hands of Providence in restoring law and order, peace and quiet to a



distracted land. He has but to carry into effect Mr. LINCOLN's and the Country's plan to accomplish that end.

I am one of those who have ever been opposed to the damnable heresy of secession. For ten years, as the editor of a public journal, I fought it with all my might and power. The evils that have followed in the train of the sad experiment, I long felt would be of the consequences, only they far outreached my calculations, as they did those of every other person. I have ever believed there was never a *real* difference of opinion or conflicting interest between the North and the South sufficient *ever to justify* a clash of arms; and I am as firmly of the opinion now, that with the proper wise policy, *that conflict would never have taken place*. A miserable, canting, hypocritical, insane faction of fanatics and trading politicians on the one side, and a contemptible, worthless, disgraceful band of fire-brands on the other, have, by co-operating, stirred and agitated the public mind to such a degree—brought politics to such a low standard as to drive from the councils of the nation our wisest statesmen and best men, who would not enter into such competition, and left the affairs of the Government in the hands of unscrupulous political hacks and unprincipled partizans who would have ruined any country on earth. It was by the American people *allowing* such cliques to rule the country that we were “precipitated” headlong into this awful and terrible war.

Look back a few years and see the result on our institutions, worked by this disgraceful and infamous band of drivelling traitors. Take a glance at our national councils in 1860, immediately preceding the breaking out of the war, and behold the instigators—the very small manner of men they were. There we behold the seat in the United States Senate, once rendered illustrious by the august presence of DANIEL WEBSTER, filled by a fawning hypocrite and cringing coward, who is unworthy to unloosen the shoe-latchets of his immortal predecessor! The classic and eloquent EVERETT was borne down beneath the black and surging waves of fanaticism, and the position he adorned in the Senate is now filled by a man who would scarcely confer credit on a seat in his State legislature. The desk that was once occupied by the towering genius of the illustrious CLAY, was at that

time *vacantly* represented by a small politician who signed himself LAZARUS W. POWELL! The WRIGHTS, CHOATES, EVANSES, CASSES, WOODBURYs, HUNTS,—the RIVESSES, BADGERS, BELLS, CLAYTONS, BERRIENS, MANGUMS and CRITTENDENS, were driven from public life into retiracy by the foul machinations of this set of base political intriguers and party jugglers. All good men truly felt the lofty sentiment uttered by the noble CATO,

When vice prevails and impious men bear away,  
The post of honor is a private station!

Had the *people*, the solid, conservative people of the North and the South been true to their duty and the great trusts confided to their keeping, they would have rose in their might and power and hurled these fomenters of discord, these pestiferous wranglers of strife, from the places they were dishonoring and disgracing, and with the mark of Cain upon their brows, driven them forth from the country whose peace and quiet they were disturbing and whose liberties they were seeking to subvert and destroy.

But they were allowed to accomplish their work. They rushed the country to the brink of ruin; and when the hour of trial comes, they are found seeking "contracts" or sneaking into "soft places" where danger is "*afar off*!" Look at the instigators—the originators before the war—the demons and fiends who were so anxious for it, and where are they now and where have they been all the time? But few, indeed, of them were "precipitated" into the "revolution," and but little of their precious "blood been let," although they were so anxious for "precipitation" and "blood letting." History will pillory all such high, and consign them to remotest posterity in the eternal infamy which they have so justly won.

Better would it have been to have adjusted all our troubles before the war and without war. They could have been settled easier *then* than they can be settled *now*, and there was never any *real obstacle* in the way, with the *people*, to prevent that settlement. The difficulties and obstacles were with small politicians who were about to lose office.

To the countless number of the gallant dead of the South, whose bones line and whiten the whole vast country, from the bloody fields of Gettysburg to the distant confines of Texas—

from the savannahs of the South, across to the plains of the far distant West;—to the incalculable loss in property;—the sufferings, misery distress and wretchedness to which our people have been the dupes and victims and sufferers;—to all of these, after so long and bloody a struggle, is now to be numbered the loss of the peculiar institution, for the better security and protection of which the war was commenced! The too eager grasp for the *shadow* has been followed by a loss of the *substance* and a *great deal more*: the foolish contention for abstract “rights in the territories,” has resulted in losing us our acknowledged and undisputed—and *would have been, forever undisturbed*,—rights to the same property, in the States.

We now have to meet the Reality—stare the fact in the face, that Slavery has perished—that the institution is forever blotted from our Government. Such is the result of an Event, the inevitable consequence of Revolution. Whether pleasant or unpleasant, we have now to open our eyes to a realization of the Fact as it exists. That is what we have now to deal with, and let us make the best of it. If the integrity of the Government, which our forefathers bequeathed to us as the richest legacy ever granted to any people on earth, can be maintained and established, *Esto Perpetua!*—if we can have PEACE,—*let it go*. It is to be regretted that our Government should have ever received a blow to mar the harmony of its magnificent workings by the infraction of the rights of the States to regulate and control their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the guarantees vouchsafed to them by the great Charter of our Rights, the Constitution;—but better that, than lose all; better give up any part, than yield the whole. Give us the Government of WASHINGTON, pure, free,—*restored to its original integrity*, and PEACE, and the American people can commence anew, and with renewed energy, vigor and enterprise, work out the Great Destiny which God in his Goodness and Wisdom marked out for this chosen land of Liberty.



